

Humor About Qaddafi Strains Libya-Italy Tie

By PAUL HOFMANN

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ROME, Jan. 3 — An Italian newspaper jokingly suggested some time ago that people wanting to sound well-informed would soon say that President Muammar el-Qaddafi of Libya was really an agent of the United States Central Intelligence Agency or was a homosexual or had a secret harem of 48 women in Switzerland.

The Libyan head of state, an austere Moslem and ardent Arab nationalist, did not think the article — in La Stampa of Turin — was funny.

President Qaddafi's wrath has ballooned into an affair of state that is embroiling the brittle relationship between Italy and Libya. It is also affecting the Middle Eastern interests of the giant Fiat motor company, which owns La Stampa.

Today it was disclosed that the Arab Boycott Committee in Beirut had requested that Fiat dismiss the authors of the article that had displeased the Libyan President and the managing editor of La Stampa, Arrigo Levi.

Warning Is Reported

The Beirut committee was reported to have warned that Fiat would be black-listed throughout the Arab world if it did not meet the demand.

The committee was also said to have expressly noted that Mr. Levi was Jewish and had fought against Arabs in 1947. The managing editor of La Stampa, one of Italy's best-known newsmen and television commentators, was indeed a volunteer with the Israeli forces in the 1947 war.

A "no comment" also came from the Italian Foreign Ministry. Italian diplomats have been worrying about President Qaddafi's mood since they were told by Libyan officials that he had read the article and had not been amused. It appears that at one point Libya even threatened to break off diplomatic relations unless an apology was offered.

Libya was an Italian colony from 1911 to the end of World War II. Colonel Qaddafi, after seizing power in a military coup in 1969, ordered Italian settlers to leave. On the other hand, he offered contracts to

2 Humorists Wrote Article

The Libyan head of state, who understands Italian, is believed to have read the article in La Stampa in the original. The article, headlined "It Seems That," was written by Carlo Fruttero and Franco Lucentini, a team of humorists who regularly contribute to La Stampa.

The column said that President Qaddafi was becoming as internationally famous as Hitler, and was likely to become a hero of international rumor mills in the same way as the Nazi leader was.

The humorists' lines included these:

"It seems that Qaddafi really is a creature of the C.I.A. He doesn't move a finger without authorization."

"A religious fanatic? Don't believe it. It seems that when he was Marshal Tito's guest he ate an entire little boar alone."

"And it seems he has an ulcer, it seems that he is a homosexual, that he sleeps on a mattress of tobacco leaves, that he keeps a harem of 48 wives in Switzerland, that he likes Mozart, that he cannot stand motorcycles and carnations. And it seems, above all, that he is particularly fond of, esteems, admires us Italians (or Frenchmen, or British, or Germans)."

After publication of the article, the press counselor of the Libyan Embassy in Rome wrote to La Stampa, strongly protesting what he termed a defamatory attack against his nation's leader.

Tonight the newsmen of La Stampa and of its afternoon edition, Stampa Sera, discussed the affair in a meeting. They issued a resolution denouncing "the absurd and inconceivable pretension to hit a newspaper with blackmail methods," and expressing support for their managing editor, Mr. Levi.

Tomorrow's issue will publish a statement by the managing editor, thanking the news staff for its backing and declaring that there had been no political pressure from Fiat.